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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON IRAQ

#### Summary

-- All papers lead today, October 19, with the trial of former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, scheduled to start today before an Iraqi court. Some papers carry extensive details about expectations of and preparations for the trial on full inside pages.

#### Editorial Commentary

-- "The Iraqi Sunnis and the upcoming requirement"

Columnist Mohammad Abu Rumman writes on the op-ed page of the independent, centrist Arabic daily Al-Ghad (10/19): "Despite news reports about extensive no-voting by the Sunni Arabs on the constitution, it is very difficult for the Sunnis to politically abort the constitution. Yet, this does not nullify the fact that a major development occurred on the Sunnis' political stand to the effect of breaking the consensus that existed against the political process. A break that took place when the Islamic party declared its acceptance of the draft constitution provided that amendments to it are made. The party, however, received extensive criticisms that reached the point of armed assaults against some of its members, not to mention criticisms by Arab writers who considered its stand as disappointing and sometimes as collaboration with the occupation. The stand of the Islamic party poses a pivotal question about the options of the Sunni Arabs and the requirements of the upcoming stage: do they continue their political boycott and armed resistance or do they take part in the political process? Had the situation in Iraq been normal and similar to the experience of Arab peoples under colonialism, the main option would have been, without a doubt, to continue the armed struggle and resistance until the occupation is removed, which is not only a legitimate stand, but also a correct human approach.. Having said this, however, the Iraqi case is quite different and requires a logical and objective reading. This poses the question about which is more dangerous to the future of Iraq: the American occupation or the explosive domestic situation? An objective reading of the situation shows clearly that there is a major defect in the internal status quo, which in itself paved the way for an easy occupation and which is dragging Iraq towards a real disaster. The most dangerous problem does not lie in the occupation but among the Iraqis themselves, who have two options: either resorting to the use of weapons and the logic of extermination and civil war, which inevitably will lead to dividing Iraq into warring small states, or building the bases for dialogue and communications, which can only be done through the current political process.. Those who oppose and reject the stand of the Islamic party, namely their participation in the political process, must provide convincing and rational alternatives, provided that the Iraqi Sunnis and Iraq do not end up paying the price. Enough bloodshed and wastage in Iraq. The Iraqis have the right to brush off the dust of the past and start their future rationally."

-- "Support the Iraqi Islamic party"

Columnist Jamal Khajuqi writes on the op-ed page of independent, centrist Arabic daily Al-Ghad: (10/19): "The reaction of extremist groups and the Salafi-Jihad oriented factions against the Iraqi Islamic party's success in achieving major concessions in its favor in the draft constitution was violent, vicious, murderous and bloody.. The Islamic party's move is positive and takes the Sunnis from the realm of boycott and marginalization to the realm of positive participation and decision-making, something that these [the extremists] do not want and so they launched a campaign of hatred and killing against the party. The party and all those moderate forces in Iraq need support in order to help Iraq and its stability."

-- "The referendum: what is it for?"

Daily columnist Rakan Majali writes on the back-page of the center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (10/18): "The processes of elections, referendums, and the constitution in Iraq are all tools in the big game aiming at deepening Iraq's wounds, creating more conflicts and struggles, disintegrating Iraq's steadfastness ... leading to dividing the people's belief in the fact that Iraq must be united, independent and sovereign. This is what America wants to achieve by feeding the conflicts, igniting dissention and spreading chaos. This is the result that America hopes to achieve and reinforce in Iraq through the referendum. Everything else is mere details!"

-- "Iraq and the Arabs"

Chief Editor Ayman Safadi writes on the back page of Al-Ghad (10/18): "The Arab League's Secretary General, Amr Mousa, is arriving too late in Baghdad carrying what he calls an Arab project to help save Baghdad from the chaos, division, terrorism and occupation. The Arab League will go down in history as having made its initiative two and half years after the Iraqis started to put together their country that was dismembered by war and dictatorship. Amr Mousa's visit to Baghdad will be a meaningless page in the history book of post-Saddam Hussein Iraq, because the interim elections took place ten months before the Arab League realized its responsibility towards Iraq, and voting on the constitution occurred a few days before the Arab League envoy arrives in Iraq. The results of these major stations in the political process are much bigger than a wordy initiative by the Arab League could do to change them. This, however, does not negate the need of Iraq to have support from the Arabs as it feels its way out of the quagmire in which the failed American policies have put it. The success of any Arab effort in Iraq is dictated by the Iraqis' acceptance of that effort. The first thing that needs to be done is a candid statement that the Arabs accept whatever the Iraqis accept for themselves. The role must be that of assistance and not guardianship."

RUBINSTEIN